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# Implications of Alternative Soviet Futures

National Intelligence Estimate

*This National Intelligence Estimate represents  
the views of the Director of Central Intelligence  
with the advice and assistance of the  
US Intelligence Community.*

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# Implications of Alternative Soviet Futures

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in the preparation of this Estimate:*

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**Figure 1**  
**Scenarios for the USSR**  
**Over the Next Five Years**



<b>Chronic Crisis</b>	<p>Continuation of current situation</p> <p>Neither entire collapse of system nor substantial progress toward resolution of country's problems</p> <p>Continued devolution of power below but unable to govern</p> <p>Political gridlock</p> <p>Economy would verge on breakdown but somehow manage to limp along</p> <p>Scenario unlikely to last next five years</p>
<b>System Change</b>	<p>System replaced with relatively little violence</p> <p>Slavic and Central Asian core state: smaller, less militarily powerful, more pluralistic than USSR</p> <p>Baltic states, Georgia, Armenia, and Moldova become independent</p> <p>Economies of all troubled, but moving rapidly toward market</p> <p>Government increasingly reflects popular will, but may not survive economic disarray</p>
<b>Regression</b>	<p>Hardliners in military, security services, and CPSU impose martial law type regime</p> <p>Democratic reform and republic independence drives halted</p> <p>Strong nationalist and reformist pressures remain</p> <p>Economy's downward spiral accelerates</p> <p>Scenario unlikely to last long</p>
<b>Fragmentation</b>	<p>Violent, chaotic collapse of system</p> <p>Republics become independent</p> <p>Some governments reflect popular will, others more authoritarian</p> <p>Warfare within and between many republics</p> <p>Economic conditions deteriorate dramatically; barter main form of economic interaction; famine widespread</p>

# Key Judgments

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## Implications of Alternative Soviet Futures

The USSR is in the midst of a revolution that probably will sweep the Communist Party from power and reshape the country within the five-year time frame of this Estimate. The outcome of this revolution will be affected by a number of factors, including the following:

- A sharply declining economy and standard of living that will get worse for the next few years no matter what economic program is adopted.
- The difficulties in implementing a market reform program and sustaining it against a likely popular backlash.
- Continued devolution of power to republic and local governments at the expense of the central government.
- The rising claim of nationalism on defining the state and legitimizing its policies.
- The increasing importance of popular expectations and aspirations, and the government's abilities to meet them, on a wide range of issues—including living standards and personal freedom.

No one can know what the duration or the ultimate outcome of the revolution will be—particularly in a society where repression and centralized control have been the rule, and the culture has been resistant to change, but where recently, democratic aspirations appear to have become widespread.

Of the many conceivable outcomes, we believe four scenarios span the range of possibilities: a continuation of the current "chronic crisis" with no political resolution; a relatively peaceful "system change" into a smaller, more pluralistic and voluntary union in which the central government relinquishes substantial power; a chaotic and violent "fragmentation" of the country resulting in many new states with widely varying political and economic systems; and a "regression" through renewed repression into an authoritarian state run by a combination of hardliners in the military, security services, and Communist Party (see figure 1).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The approach taken by the Intelligence Community in this Estimate is intended to be more speculative, and less predictive, than in previous estimates on political developments in the USSR. We focus on a range of possible outcomes and their implications for both the USSR and the West, rather than on current developments. Although the

scenarios we use to describe these outcomes are very similar to the four used in NIE 11-18-90 November 1990, *The Deepening Crisis in the USSR: Prospects for the Next Year*, they are meant to be "ideal cases" in order to make the distinctions between them clear. The reality is certain to be much more complicated.

**Figure 2**  
**Implications of Scenarios**  
**for Key Issues**

Scenarios		System Change	Regression	Fragmentation
Issues	Chronic Crisis			
Policy toward the West	Accommodation, but increasingly erratic policy Will seek economic assistance/engagement and accept some conditionality	Would seek full-scale accommodation, inclusion in European security structures Would seek economic assistance/engagement and accept conditionality	Wary, but would seek to avoid confrontation Would not expect economic assistance	No coherent policy Many governments in republics and regions that break away would seek close ties, military and economic assistance
Military posture	Continued gradual reduction in military capabilities Deteriorating economy could lead to deeper cuts "Defensive" doctrine maintained	Slavic and Central Asian core: significantly reduced military; would remain nuclear super-power; increased emphasis on "defensive" doctrine Independent 6: Small militaries; a threat only to small neighbors	Would seek to maintain Soviet military strength, within constraints of deteriorating economy Increased emphasis on counteroffensive capabilities	No coherent military doctrine or threat to West But possible loss of control over nuclear weapons would lead to dangerous, unpredictable situation Most military power vested in Russia
Arms control	Continued pursuit of new agreements, but within old frameworks Increasing disarray and periodic ascendancy of hardliners would complicate progress Adherence to agreements likely	Slavic and Central Asian core: vigorous pursuit of wide-ranging arms reduction treaties Independent 6: Would seek to join CSCE arms control and confidence-building process Adherence to agreements not an issue	Might enter negotiations, but only on Soviet terms Willingness to adhere to existing agreements increasingly doubtful	No coherent policy Unable to ensure compliance with existing agreements
Policy toward Eastern Europe	No military threat, but would continue to push for neutral Eastern Europe	No military threat Basis for new cooperative relationships between various new states and Eastern Europe Would not oppose East European entry into European security structures	Unlikely to threaten militarily But could stall on withdrawal from Poland Would push hard for neutral Eastern Europe Might use energy deliveries as leverage	Massive numbers of refugees Potential spillover of civil war Potential clashes over Moldova, Kaliningrad, western Ukraine and Belorussia
Forces in Germany	Potential point of instability Would offer to remove them earlier in return for German economic sweetener	Would be willing to bring them home more quickly Issue not likely to be troublesome	Internal political situation would have destabilizing effect on WGF Increase in defections Hardline leadership could threaten to delay withdrawal	Breakdown of discipline, unit cohesion Thousands of defectors

This Estimate's focus is on the content and implications rather than on the relative probabilities of such scenarios. The USSR could pass through any or all of these scenarios during the next five years. Nevertheless, we believe that, on the basis of current trends and our assessment of the critical variables—particularly the bleak prospects for the economy—the country is much more likely to be in a “system change” or “fragmentation” scenario five years from now than to remain where it is today in “chronic crisis.” In our view, an attempt to impose the hardline regime of the “regression” scenario becomes more likely as the country verges on “system change” or “fragmentation,” but, of the four scenarios, this is the least likely to be a lasting outcome. In any event, we believe that the USSR in its present form will not exist five years from now.

There will be profound effects on the geopolitical balance in Eurasia whatever the outcome. “System change,” the most favorable scenario for the USSR and the West, would leave the USSR somewhat smaller than it is today and still a nuclear superpower, but this Slavic-Central Asian state would have adopted a political and economic system much more conducive to close ties to the West. Even so, the difficulties associated with such a transformation over the longer term may be too heavy a burden for the government and population to bear.

The geopolitical shift would be most drastic in a “fragmentation” scenario, where the country broke apart in a chaotic fashion. Some form of a Russian or Russian-dominated state would eventually emerge out of the chaos, but for a good many years it would be a far less influential actor on the world scene than today's Soviet Union, and it would be bordered by many new countries of varying stability and military strength.

The ability of Western governments to influence the course of events inside the USSR is likely to grow in the “chronic crisis” and “system change” scenarios and in the *aftermath* of a “fragmentation” scenario:

- The country's crumbling economy will increase the likelihood that any government, except one led by hardliners, will turn to the West for aid and accept some degree of economic and political conditionality in return. The need for such aid would give most national and republic leaders an incentive to avoid repressive measures.
- Even though the upper limits of what the West might realistically offer would fall far short of the country's total capital needs, such aid could play an important role in moving the country toward “system change”; that is, the transition toward a market economy and a more pluralistic political system.

- Western assistance could play an important role in the newly independent Baltic republics, simply because of their much smaller size. On the other hand, local and regional instabilities in the Transcaucasus and Central Asia are likely to limit Western inclination to provide assistance to these republics.

With the exception of the "system change" scenario, the West would face major obstacles in actually exerting influence. In a "chronic crisis" scenario, which the USSR is in today, aid for political and economic reform would be hard to channel into projects that would benefit long-term growth and could get caught in a struggle for power between the center and the republics. In this, and particularly in the "fragmentation" scenario, the gathering political and economic disarray would make it more difficult to determine whom to aid, how to get it to them, and how to follow up to ensure the aid had its intended effect.

The aftereffects of increased instability or repression would also pose challenges to the West:

- The East Europeans, the Turks, and the Nordic countries would turn to the United States and other major Western powers for assistance in coping with refugees, instability on their borders, or a military-led government in Moscow.
- In a "fragmentation" scenario, various factions or republics could gain access to and control of nuclear weapons and threaten to use them against internal rivals or other countries. Although any Western involvement would depend on a number of variables, timely Western offers of assistance in securing and/or disposing of such weapons could have pivotal effect.
- Seizure of control by hardliners in a "regression" scenario would lead to an increase in East-West tensions, a greatly diminished interest in arms control and other negotiations, and a slowing in the reduction in the capabilities of the Soviet military.
- Violence at home could spread to the Soviet troops that are due to remain in Germany until the end of 1994.



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## Discussion

### Chronic Crisis

This scenario assumes a continuation of the current crisis with neither an entire collapse of the system nor substantial progress toward resolution of the country's problems. Gorbachev might manage to hang on to power in a weakened central government because neither the left nor the right would have enough strength to oust him, but, even if he left the scene, neither side would gain the upper hand. The country goes from one system-threatening crisis to another. Despite the turmoil, much backtracking, and political stalemate at the top, the trend is toward more autonomy for the republics and a market-based economy but in a bottom-up and relatively chaotic way. The command economy verges on breakdown but somehow manages to limp along.

### Implications for the USSR

The current situation in the USSR is best described by this scenario. This is a highly unstable scenario. Although there would be some continued movement toward a pluralistic system, a voluntary union, and a market economy, governmental authority would weaken, and the potential for major popular upheavals would grow. It is unlikely this scenario could prevail for the five years of this Estimate. Indeed, a transition to one of the other three scenarios of "system change," "fragmentation," or "regression" is likely earlier rather than later in this period.

If Gorbachev remained in office, he would become less and less powerful. Neither the left nor the right would prevail, but both would remain strong enough to pose a serious threat to Gorbachev and to each other. The potential for large-scale intervention into politics by the security services and the military would continue to hang over the country. Although less likely, this scenario could still exist if Gorbachev is removed constitutionally, decides on his own to step down, or dies a natural death. Whoever is in charge, the central government would continue to lose authority, although without Gorbachev this would occur more quickly.

### Indicators of "Chronic Crisis"

- *Economy continues to deteriorate, but command economy does not collapse.*
- *Center/republics discussions on economic stabilization/reform plan drag out without resolution (or they agree and the plan fails); center pursues ineffective ad hoc policies; republics try to implement individual economic programs.*
- *Central government remains viable but power steadily erodes.*
- *Center/republics unable to resolve key differences concerning powers of national and republic governments.*
- *Political polarization grows, but neither right nor left are strong enough to become dominant.*
- *Violence continues but at relatively low levels; periodic incidents of regional repression occur.*
- *Military and security services act more independently but shrink from a coup.*

The republics would gather a good deal of the authority the center lost but still would not be able to govern effectively. None would be fully independent, but many—the Baltic states, Georgia, Armenia, and Moldova—would remain tethered to the union only by the continued presence of Soviet troops and the vestiges of the central command economy. Russia would gain greater control over its own affairs

and increased influence with other republics, but it would not yet be strong enough to transform the center to its liking or assume all of the central government's former authority within the RSFSR. Yel'tsin's strength in Russia and the USSR would grow, at least initially, but he would be hamstrung by the center's continuing ability to limit the RSFSR's economic sovereignty, by infighting within his own camp (abetted by the KGB), and by demands of non-Russians in the republic for greater autonomy or independence.

With no resolution of the center-republic relationship, there would be no hope of stabilizing or reversing the economic slide. GNP would drop dramatically, and the country would face worsening shortages of industrial materials, consumer goods, and food. Inflation and unemployment would skyrocket; strikes would proliferate. Significant human suffering would develop in some areas. Foreign credits would dry up as the country failed to meet debt service payments; Western companies—scared off by the growing political and economic chaos—would take their business elsewhere. Nevertheless, the economy would avoid collapse through a major expansion of independent arrangements and barter deals that republics, enterprises, and individuals made with each other.

The economic disarray and growing republic autonomy would accelerate the trend toward reduced military capabilities. The military leadership would try to ensure that the drop in allocations to the military was not dramatic, but the trend would still be decidedly downward because the military economy would not be insulated from the accelerating decline. The republics' quest for greater autonomy or independence would exacerbate the Soviet armed forces' manpower and morale problems. Modernization of Moscow's strategic forces would continue within the limits of a START treaty, but even these forces would increasingly be affected by the economy's dismal performance.

#### Implications for the West

In this scenario, the ability to conduct foreign policy by whoever leads the central Soviet government would be constrained by the turmoil at home. Western governments would find Gorbachev or a successor not

only preoccupied by the domestic crisis but also less and less able to ensure that the USSR is capable of fulfilling the foreign commitments it makes. Nevertheless, any Soviet regime in this scenario probably would still seek accommodation on a range of international issues and almost certainly would want to avoid confrontation. The Soviets would be likely to continue:

- Deepening the growing economic and political relationships with the United States, Western Europe, and, to a lesser extent, Japan.
- Negotiating ongoing and new arms control agreements.
- Cooperating in crafting a new European security order.
- Reducing military and economic commitments, while expanding cooperation with the United States, in the Third World.

Whatever the Soviet Government's *intentions*, the economy's rapidly decreasing ability to support a massive military, the likely increased involvement of the Soviet army in quelling domestic unrest, and the general lack of cohesion within the country would seriously limit the USSR's *capability* to threaten its neighbors or the West. The Soviet Union would almost certainly complete its withdrawal of forces from Eastern Europe, possibly more quickly than scheduled. The leadership would have every incentive to adhere to the terms of the CFE and START treaties and probably would seek further arms reductions to lighten the military burden on the economy.

In this scenario, Soviet as well as republic interest in Western economic involvement would continue to expand rapidly. The deteriorating economy would ensure that the central government would continue to seek access to Western economic institutions and be on the West's doorstep for loans, credits, and general economic assistance, although it would not be able to repay such assistance. [

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as interference and could result in attempts by the central government to block Western assistance to republics and localities.

### System Change

This scenario assumes that the existing political system is replaced with relatively little violence. This occurs with the old regime's dissolution as a result of republic or popular pressure—as in Czechoslovakia in 1989—or through agreement between the center and the republics. In either case, a loose federation or confederation of the Slavic and Central Asian republics emerges, and independence is granted to those republics seeking it. The political and economic systems that emerge in the core Slavic-Central Asian state and the independent states vary widely.

### Implications for the USSR

The level of instability in this scenario would depend on the manner in which the system was changed. If it collapsed due to internal pressure, the instability initially would be greater: new governing mechanisms would have to be created in the midst of revolution, and many elements of the old system—while defeated—would remain capable and desirous of complicating the transition to a new system. A voluntary sharing of power by the center would be more stable, although, even in this variant, the new systems that emerged from what was the USSR would encounter problems much more serious than those now being experienced by post-Communist regimes in Eastern Europe.

The newly transformed core state that emerges in this scenario would reflect the political and economic trends in Russia and, to a lesser extent, in the Ukraine. As such, it—particularly its Slavic portion—would have, at least initially, a much more pluralistic political and economic system than ever before. It would have a popularly elected parliamentary government with numerous political parties. While the role of the state would remain large, its authority would depend much more than heretofore on popular acceptance. The government's respect for human rights

Special requests for consultations, technical assistance, emergency aid, and trade from republic and local governments are likely to increase. Without political resolution of the conflict over who owns resources and controls foreign trade, both US governmental and private business relations with the USSR and its republics will be complicated and harder to sustain. Those direct Western contacts with the republics disapproved of by Moscow would be perceived

**Figure 3**  
**System Change: Loose Federation/Confederation**  
**With Some Independent States**



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would start to resemble that of Western governments. The Central Asian regions, on the other hand, would remain basically authoritarian and have poor human rights records.

The republics would have substantial autonomy, with the center playing the leading—though even here not exclusive—role in foreign, defense, fiscal/monetary, and communications/transportation policies. The presidency of the new union would have less scope and be a less powerful office than it is today. There would be a strong push toward a market economy, although the central and republic governments would continue

to run a large portion of major industry, and reforms would be implemented unevenly in the republics. Progress would be much more gradual and the social pain much greater than has been the case in Poland.

Russia's influence in the new union could become a source of tension. Its leadership, most likely under Yel'tsin, would have played the leading role in creating the new system giving greater power to the

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*Indicators of "System Change"*

- *Center/republics sign and begin implementation of union treaty and new constitution devolving significant power to republics.*
- *Republics assume control of their economic and political lives; undertake substantial steps toward market reform.*

*Or, alternatively:*

- *Large-scale public protests, labor unrest, and republic pressure cause the central government to collapse.*
- *Reformers/republics give up hope of reaching negotiated settlement with the center and conclude bilateral and multilateral agreements reserving most powers to themselves and defining areas of the center's limited authority.*

individual republics. Yet Russia would be an even more powerful primus inter pares than it is today because of Yel'tsin's prestige and because of the resources it would control. Its growing sense of national identity and the possible emergence of a "Russia first" attitude could also undermine the new union. Ukrainian nationalism could also lead this republic to go its own way with similar effect.

A Slavic-Central Asian state would have most of the military potential that the USSR has today, although it probably would choose to field smaller and more Slavic armed forces. It would continue to be a nuclear superpower, but its conventional forces would be much reduced and their posture largely defensive. The market reforms that such a state would undertake, however, would over time (but not in the five-year time frame of this Estimate) give it a more reliable economic base for developing military technologies and modernizing the military, should its leadership and people decide on such a course.

The biggest problem for the six republics that would form independent states would be economic because of their meager industrial and resource bases and their small populations. Most would move quickly toward market economies, but how well their economies functioned would also depend heavily on the degree to which they cooperated with the Slavic-Central Asian state, each other, and their other neighbors. The Baltic states would be parliamentary democracies; the other three—while democratic in form—probably would tend more toward authoritarian states.

The internal growing pains that the Slavic-Central Asian state and the others experience would complicate relations among them. Demarcating the new borders alone would be enough to generate tensions. The most serious problems—which would entail some violence—would most likely be between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and between the new union, on the one hand, and Georgia and Moldova, on the other.

Such problems among and inside the new regimes that emerged in "system change" could over the longer run become serious enough to cause such a regime to fail. Reestablishment of the old Communist order would not occur, but the military and security services might be able to resume control (as in the "regression" scenario) or chaos and wide-scale violence could ensue (as in the "fragmentation" scenario) due to the failure of political and economic reform.

**Implications for the West**

Despite the uncertainties such tensions among the former components of the USSR would create for the West, this would be far and away the most favorable outcome for Western countries. The Slavic-Central Asian core state would be smaller, less militarily powerful, much more pluralistic, and almost certainly more desirous of close relations with the West than was the USSR. Especially in the period following its creation, it would seek extensive Western involvement in developing its political and, particularly, economic

player on the world scene. It would seek admission to European economic and security structures, posing dilemmas for Western governments. East European states already seek membership in these institutions, and some would worry that the new Soviet Union's acceptance into these clubs would dilute the meaningfulness of their membership. On the other hand, East European fears of a resurgent, militaristic USSR or of massive instability there would be substantially reduced in such a scenario.

The Slavic-Central Asian core state probably would seek a major expansion of arms control agreements with the West. It would have an economic interest in cutting its military, and—perceiving the United States as a vital source of assistance—probably would seek significant reductions in strategic arms. This state would not forgo nuclear weapons, since they would continue to be important to its security and superpower status, but it probably would be willing to make reciprocal, and perhaps even radical, cuts in numbers of weapons.

The Allies probably would see less justification for maintaining NATO and a US troop presence on the Continent if the Soviet Union disintegrated as depicted in this scenario. The Europeans would almost certainly invite the new states to join CSCE. The Allies, however, would resist any efforts by these new states to join NATO.

#### Regression

This scenario assumes traditionalist forces seize control in order to break the back of the democratic reform movement and halt the republics' move toward sovereignty and independence. Although Gorbachev could lead such a move, it is more likely he would be compelled to go along or be forced from office. The security services and the military, who spearhead this course, use force on a large scale to reassert central control. Widespread arrests of leading opponents, including Yel'tsin, occur. The new leaders attempt to

structures. This probably would give the West unprecedented opportunities to shape development of the new state, but it would also bring with it requests for far more substantial economic aid than Western countries would be willing to provide. The West would face very hard choices in apportioning limited economic assistance among the Slavic-Central Asian state, the other newly independent states, and the democracies of Eastern Europe.

The Slavic-Central Asian state, while heavily focused during the time frame of this Estimate on creating a new system at home, would still be an important

reinstitute centralized control over the economy. Although this averts collapse of the command economy for awhile, it does little to halt the economy's continuing sharp decline.

#### **Implications for the USSR**

This scenario would involve a series of harsh measures that succeed in reestablishing a measure of central control. The use of force could produce political "stability" for a few years, given the organizational weakness of the democratic forces and the lack of unity among the republics bent on secession. This course might also appeal to a significant portion of the Slavic-Central Asian publics tired of political debate and seeking political order and economic stability. Such popular support would prove short-lived, however, if the new government failed to deliver. Eventually, renewed political opposition and civil disorder would probably develop.

The new leaders would find it difficult to gain popular legitimacy for their rule. The draconian step of reintroducing the command-administrative economic system, largely discarded under Gorbachev, would not be able to rebuild the center-republic economic ties disrupted by the independence movement. As workers saw their economic status continuing to deteriorate, they would become less reluctant to engage in passive and active resistance to the center's power.

The new government would also lack an ideological basis to justify its actions, since Marxism-Leninism has been totally discredited, along with the Communist Party. An appeal to Russian nationalism by the conservative leadership would be possible—and could take the form of a national salvation committee—but such a step would further antagonize the restive republics. It could provide the basis for an authoritarian regime in Russia, however, that follows a "Russia first" policy at the expense of the rest of the union.

The biggest problem for the leadership would be maintaining unionwide control. The use of force to hold the union together would almost certainly lead to open civil conflict within several republics, particularly those having their own paramilitary forces, such as Georgia and Armenia. Controlling such unrest

#### **Indicators of "Regression"**

- *Gorbachev, or successors, use whatever force necessary to maintain the union.*
- *Traditionalists gain dominance, begin setting political and economic agenda.*
- *Regime censors media, suppresses individual freedoms; harasses/arrests opposition groups.*
- *Regime reasserts central control over the economy.*

would severely tax security and military forces; prolonged conflict would threaten the internal cohesion and discipline of the troops, particularly if they had to be used against Slavic groups.

This scenario could unravel quickly if the center were unable to quash the democratic resistance, if Yel'tsin or another popular leader were able to escape the center's dragnet and rally popular resistance, or if the military proved unreliable. Even so, reform and republic leaders might not survive even a short-lived repression, leaving a political vacuum at the center and in many republics. Such widespread unrest would also exacerbate the ethnic, political, and generational splits within the armed forces and security services.

If repression failed, the result probably would be anarchy and a chaotic disintegration of the union; that is, the "fragmentation" scenario. In that event, most republics would break away from the center. This breakup of the union would most likely be accompanied by civil wars.

#### **Implications for the West**

This scenario, while less volatile than "fragmentation," would create conditions least responsive to Western influence. The immediate outcome would be a more combative posture toward the West, which the new leadership would see as opposed to its seizure of power and its harsh internal measures. Western criticism would fuel a "hunker down" attitude among the



similar to the Brezhnev era, even though it might place greater priority on heavy and defense industry. It would assert its rights as a military power, but its main focus would be on the USSR's internal problems.

#### Fragmentation

This scenario assumes there is no effective central government. Power resides in the republics and, in some cases, even in localities. Republics, along with many of the ethnically based regions, secede en masse from the union. Ethnic and social tensions explode in many areas; the security services and military are unable to maintain order. The result is widespread anarchy and local civil wars made worse by the proliferation of paramilitary forces and the defection of units from the military. Attempts to establish ties among republics prove difficult due to differences in political and economic agendas and the ineffective control of most governments. Many regional and local governments quickly rise and fall. The collapse of the national command economy and its supporting infrastructure leads to local systems of exchange, largely based on barter.

#### Implications for the USSR

This scenario not only would spell the end of the USSR as a unitary state, it would also make it unlikely that the union could reconstitute itself as a federation, or even a confederation, during the time frame of this Estimate. The country's fragmentation into a number of individual political units, many overtly or potentially hostile toward one another, would increase the likelihood of prolonged civil wars, which would further sap the strength of already besieged local economies. The economic chaos would lead to severe food shortages or even famine in parts of the country.

The power vacuum in Moscow would heighten prospects for a military seizure of power and a succession of coups, as senior military commanders tried to hold

leadership, further straining relations. The regime's probable political, economic, and military policies would generate renewed concern in the West over the USSR's intentions and would frighten the Soviet Union's neighbors, particularly in Eastern Europe. Such a regime, however, probably would seek to avoid confrontation with the West because of the fragility of the situation within the USSR.

The hardline leadership would place arms control negotiations on the back burner, and its willingness to adhere to existing arms control agreements—particularly CFE—would be increasingly doubtful as political tensions with the West rose. There probably would be a greatly reduced willingness to cooperate with the West in reducing regional tensions, although for economic reasons the new leadership would be reluctant to be drawn into foreign adventures. Nevertheless, the regime would take an aggressive approach to arms sales to the Third World, complicating Western efforts at promoting regional security.

Such a regime would adopt a more assertive attitude toward the countries of Eastern Europe and might threaten to hold up any remaining troop withdrawals unless Germany and Poland acceded to Soviet security and economic demands. Given its weakened condition and preoccupation with maintaining internal control, however, a traditionalist regime would almost certainly remove these forces in the end rather than precipitate an East-West crisis.

Although more confrontational, the regime would be unable, due to the changed social environment and the weakened economy, to conduct an arms buildup

**Figure 4**  
**The Fragmentation of the Soviet Union**  
**Into a Multitude of States**



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together the rapidly collapsing union. Even if elements in the military and security services were inclined to intervene in an effort to rescue the union, they would not be able to ensure the loyalty of many of the individual units. Widespread defections and mutinies would make large-scale use of force to stabilize the situation impossible. There would be a very real danger that military and security force units would defect to the leadership of the republics, providing a ready pool of men and arms with which to

prosecute conflict against other republics or disaffected elements within the republics. Some of these forces could also pose a threat to the leadership of the now independent republics.

"Fragmentation" is not likely to last indefinitely. As with "system change," there would be no possibility of putting the old system back together again, but new

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*Indicators of "Fragmentation"*

- *Cooperation between center and most republics ceases; republics ignore center's directives, including laws on military conscription.*
- *Central and republic governments increasingly unable to control violent protests over deteriorating economic and political conditions; but opposition unable to unite, coordinate actions.*
- *Interrepublic ties dwindle sharply; republics make political, economic, and territorial demands on one another.*
- *Command economy collapses; attempts by republics and localities to establish alternative economic systems fail; economic conditions deteriorate sharply.*
- *Military discipline begins to unravel.*
- *Ethnic and labor disturbances spread rapidly.*

attempts at forging cooperation among some of the peoples of the former Soviet Union would be made. Russia would be the key. The establishment of strong and effective leadership in the Russian Republic could stabilize the political and economic situation in a relatively short period (perhaps several years) depending on the policies it adopted and its abilities to establish economic ties to other republics and countries. Such a development would also depend on the Russian leadership's ability to exercise control over its own disaffected ethnic groups, as well as its ability to gain command of what remains of the armed forces. An economically and politically viable Russia would exercise a strong influence on neighboring peoples still wrestling with the effects of the collapse of the USSR.

**Implications for the West**

This scenario is potentially the most dangerous for the West because of the chaos and unpredictability of events. Although the USSR would disappear as a cohesive military power, the prospects of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction falling into the hands of some republics, mutinous troops, or radical groups would pose a new set of risks. There would be a heightened risk of threatened or accidental use of such weapons inside—and much less likely, outside—the Soviet Union. There would also be a greater chance for nuclear materials and expertise finding their way to foreign states seeking to develop nuclear weapons.

Widespread civil conflict or war within and between republics would also pose major dangers for the West. Conflict within the former territory of the USSR would have the potential for spilling across borders, particularly in central and southern Europe and Southwest Asia. Western countries would have to weigh the merits of recognizing new governments in breakaway republics or in Russia itself. One or another of the contending factions would be likely to appeal to the West for economic and military assistance, if not outright security guarantees.

Beyond the dangers posed to the West by the interne-cine strife would be the very real challenge of dealing with the extreme economic hardship, including famine, likely to affect the bulk of the former USSR. Massive infusions of assistance and capital would almost certainly be required to alleviate suffering, but the lack of a central government, or perhaps even republic governments, capable of directing the inflow of economic aid—as well as ongoing violence—would undermine the effectiveness of any effort. The West would also be confronted with the problem of massive numbers of refugees fleeing the disorder, which could

destabilize countries bordering the USSR. Despite these problems, Western assistance probably would be critical to the ability of the various republics and regions to move beyond the difficulties associated with this scenario to more stable political and economic systems.

This scenario would also make any coherent Soviet foreign policy extremely unlikely. There would be no central authority in Moscow to conclude arms control negotiations, implement accords already reached, or to ensure the completion of troop withdrawals from Central Europe. Moreover, in a situation of anarchy and civil wars in the USSR, Soviet forces remaining in the region would not be a military threat but would present serious problems for their hosts should they refuse repatriation; widespread disorder among these troops would be likely.

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